

# 101 Critical Days of Summer 2011



## GRILLING SAFETY



Nothing can ruin your reputation as a grill jockey faster than an out-of-control fire, so take the time to get your barbecuing equipment in top working order and reacquaint yourself with the fundamentals of grilling safety. Follow these tips on charcoal grills, gas grills, and general grilling safety to make sure your backyard barbecues go off without a hitch.



A mother in Texas threw a match on a pile of briquettes, then splashed gasoline on top. Only the quick reaction of a neighbor, who knocked the exploding gas can out of a mother's hands, averted tragedy!

Incidents like this are not uncommon. According to the National Fire Protection Association, in 2011, gas and charcoal grills caused 3,400 structure fires and 4,900 outdoor fires in the U.S. resulting in property losses alone in excess of \$137 million. So even if you normally skip safety warnings -- read on.

## Getting Started with Gas Grills

Make sure there are no insects or cobwebs under the burner knobs, in the grill manifolds, or in the connecting hoses. Replace any obviously crimped, brittle, cracked, or nicked connectors or hoses.

If the pinholes on the burner tubes are clogged, carefully unclog them with a straight pin or bent paper clip. Make sure the burner knobs turn freely; if they don't, squirt the valves with WD-40. If your grill has an igniter switch, make sure it's in working order. You may need to replace the battery -- usually a single AA. Clean the drip pan in the highly unlikely event you forgot to clean it at the end of last season.

To clean the grill grates, preheat the grill and grates screaming hot, then brush with a stiff wire brush. Don't forget to oil the grate with a grate oiler or a folded paper towel dipped in oil and drawn across the grate at the end of tongs. A grate is easy to clean when it's hot, and almost impossible to clean when it's cold. Then, throughout the season, keep your grate hot, keep it clean, keep it lubricated. The more you use the grill, the more the grate will resist rust and sticking.

Check the level of gas in the propane tank by weighing it; an empty tank will weigh about 18 pounds, a full tank, about 38. Another way to check the gas level in a propane tank is to pour a cup of boiling water over the side: the water will condense at the level where there's gas. (Do not allow a supplier to overfill your tank as the gas needs head space.) Make sure the tank itself is in good condition and not showing signs of distress, bulging, or rust. Always transport it in an upright position -- I've found a milk crate works well.

Reconnect the LP tank (which you removed from the grill last year and stored outside away from the house or other structures, right?).

Check all hoses and connections for leaks with a leak detection solution made by mixing equal amounts of liquid dish soap and water. Brush this mixture over the hoses and connectors. Open the shut-off valve, and if you see bubbling (which indicates a leak), immediately turn the gas off. Do not attempt to light the grill until the leak has been repaired. It's not a bad idea to perform this test periodically, especially when lighting a grill after an extended period of disuse.

To light, open the lid of the grill, then turn on the gas at the tank. (Never light a gas grill with the lid closed -- you'll get a gas build-up and possible explosion.) Turn the burner knob to "high" or "ignite." On some models, the igniter is slaved to a specific burner and you must light that tube first before lighting the rest of the grill. (Again, always follow the manufacturer's instructions.)

For more tips on safe propane grilling, visit the [Propane Education and Research Council website](#).

If the grill doesn't light after a couple of clicks, turn off the burner control knob, turn the gas off at the tank, and wait 5 or 10 minutes before attempting to light it again. If everything seems to be in order but your grill still fails to light, call the manufacturer. And maybe make other plans for dinner.

## Getting Started with Charcoal Grills

Thoroughly cleaning your grill. (Of course, you did that the last time you used your grill, but just double-check.) Scrape out any congealed ash at the bottom of the firebox or kettle bowl with a garden trowel. Empty the ash catcher (if you haven't already done so). Squirt any sticky vents with a silicone spray like WD-40. Treat minor rust or dings with a high-quality heatproof paint. If rust is beginning to eat through the grill walls, it's time to say goodbye, no matter how many good times you've shared.

Clean the grill grate by heating, brushing, and oiling, as described above, or do as my assistant, Nancy Loseke, does -- she buys a new grate for her kettle grill each year for about \$15. There are also cleaning agents on the market formulated especially for barbecue

grills. Check with your local hardware or grill store. Again, the more you use the grill, the more the grate will resist rust and sticking.

And while you're at it, take inventory of supporting equipment. Do you need more or better chimney starters, long-handled tongs, grill brushes, or spatulas? How's your supply of paraffin fire starters, disposable drip pans, or long matches? Do you have plenty of charcoal? (Store the latter in a tight fitting metal can to keep it from becoming damp.)

There are several ways to light a charcoal fire -- the aforementioned lighter fluid (and a related product, self-lighting charcoal, which consists of briquettes soaked with lighter fluid), an electric starter, and a chimney starter.

The latter is my favorite. Charcoal goes in the top and a crumpled piece of newspaper or a paraffin fire starter, which you ignite with a gas lighter or long match, goes in the bottom. In 15 to 20 minutes, you have a cylinder full of evenly lit coals. The beauty of a chimney is that it lights the coals uniformly without petroleum-based starters. It's easy to use and easy to transfer the coals where you need them.

When arranging the coals in the grill for direct grilling, leave at least 30 per cent of the grill coal free--this creates a safety zone where you can move food in case of flare-ups. And always wear long, heavy leather grilling gloves when handling chimney starters and coals.

## General Grill Safety

- Position gas and charcoal grills 10 feet from walls, siding, deck railings, eaves, shrubbery, or other combustibles. Do the same with chimney starters. According to the National Fire Prevention Association, over one-third of all fires started by gas or charcoal grills begin on overhanging balconies or unenclosed porches.
- Place a large heavy sheet of metal under the grill or use a protective pad, like the one manufactured by DiversiTech to shield your deck from dripping grease or sparks.
- Never bring a barbecue grill indoors (charcoal or gas) or into any unventilated space like a garage. Carbon monoxide is odorless, tasteless, and deadly.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill. I'd add rambunctious lawn games (such as football or soccer) and guests who have had one too many to drink. Make sure the grill's on level ground and that its placement doesn't interfere with normal foot traffic patterns.
- Wear fitted clothing -- nothing loose. Long-sleeved shirts and long pants are the preferred uniform of serious grill jockeys. And closed

shoes, of course. The first time you step barefooted on a loose ember or a hot spark or dripping fat hits the top of a sandaled foot, you'll appreciate this advice.

- Never leave a lit grill unattended. Remember the last of Steven's [Ten Commandments of Great Grilling](#): "Never desert your post."
- Always have a bucket of water and a dry, fully-charged chemical fire extinguisher on hand. Make friends with your local fire department and have your extinguisher checked annually. A large box of coarse salt can be useful for extinguishing small grease fires. Sprinkle it on top. Call 911 without delay if a fire can't be immediately controlled.
- Always use long-handled grilling tools to avoid leaning over the grill while cooking.

## Shutting down charcoal or gas grills

- Let charcoal cool completely -- either let the coals burn down, or close the vents and the lid to starve the coals of oxygen. (Pouring water in the grill to douse hot coals is never a good idea. It results in hot and dangerous steam, and can damage the grill itself.) The [charcoal and ash can](#) I designed for my Best of Barbecue line is a perfect receptacle for hot coals, and a necessity if you're a tailgater or "leave no trace" camper. Common sense dictates you should wait until the next morning to empty out ashes, and of course, never place them in a paper bag or plastic garbage can. A live coal can survive for more than 12 hours.
- Never attach or disconnect an LP tank or fiddle with fittings when the grill is on. If you run out of gas during a grilling session, turn off all the burners, reconnect the new tank, and light it afresh.
- After you're done grilling and while the grill is hot, brush and oil the grill grate. Or if the grate is especially dirty, burn off the crud, then brush and oil the grate. Be sure to turn all the burners off (including rotisserie and smoker box burner -- you wouldn't believe how often people forget to do this, me included, and lose a whole tank of gas. Crank down the gas shut-off valve. Disconnect the LP couplings once the grill has cooled if the grill will be idle for several days.



**DID YOU KNOW? The Leading Causes of Summer Injuries & Deaths in the Marine Corps are:**

Motorcycles  
Drowning / Water Activities  
Water Sports  
Team & Contact Sports  
Outdoor Recreation

The fourth of July is rapidly approaching and with it comes the opportunity to enjoy a variety of summertime activities. It is also a period in which the Navy and Marine Corps lose many members of their families to avoidable accidents. Every year, people are injured because of gas grill fires, and many of these fires and explosions occur when consumers first use a grill that has been stored away for the winter. The leading causes of injuries and fires from gas grilling are leaking fuel lines, improperly connected hoses, and cracked or broken hoses. With more people lighting up their grills, it is important to remember that a successful barbecue is a safe barbecue. Many people have experienced that having a gas grill unexpectedly explode and go "woomph" when being lit is not fun. Many individuals get their face and eyebrows singed when, unknown to a lot of people, the grill gas valve was partially open when they went to light it. Remember, any time you work with fire there is a chance of being burned. So take precautions, use common sense, and employ proper planning to prevent injuries. Fire in the grill, under hot dogs and burgers, is a welcome sight at the cookout, but fire anywhere else can make your summer barbecue memorable for all the wrong reasons. Make sure the next time you light up your grill that you do so safely. Move your grill further away from the house now as it is too close after reading the safety tips in this report. I hope you will consider some of the tips and act if need be to reduce the risk of being burned. Have a happy and safe summer. After reviewing the safety tips throw a steak on the grill and enjoy!!

Once Again, we encourage you to review the **"Marine Corps Traffic Safety Program", (MCO 5100.19E) and the (MCO 5100.30A) Off Duty Recreation Order.** Collectively we can collectively raise the bar in awareness, reduce risk and maintain a high level of readiness 24/7!

[Click on the link for more tips.](#)

<http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/>